UNCLAS TALLINN 000658

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SUBJECT: ESTONIA: PRESIDENT RUUTEL TO RUN FOR SECOND
TERM

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¶1. (SBU) Summary. As expected, President Ruutel
announced on June 13 that he will seek a second term as
President of Estonia. Ruutel's party, People's Union,
is working hard to ensure the election is decided in the
Electoral College, where Ruutel has stronger support.
This has only added to the speculation and the
difficulty for the other five parties who are striving
to find a compromise candidate to avoid a second round
run-off election. The question dominating the political
horizon is who the Center Party will decide to support
and what is the price for Center's votes, which will
likely determine the eventual winner. End Summary.

¶2. (U) In March five parties (Center Party, Pro Patria
Union, Res Publica, Reform, and the Social Democrats)
agreed to find a mutually acceptable presidential
candidate in order to elect the next president in
Parliament and avoid a second round run-off in the
Electoral College. (Sixty-eight votes are needed to
have the president elected in the 101-seat Parliament.)
The only party that refused to participate was the
People's Union (PU), President Ruutel's party. Each
party duly submitted a list of presidential candidates
(reftel). The list was whittled down to seven and then
to four: Euro MP Toomas Hendrik Ilves, Rector of Tartu
University Jaak Aaviksoo, Parliament Vice-Speaker Ene
Ergma and entrepreneur Jaan Manitski. All three of the
Center Party's nominees have been eliminated, even
though without Center's votes it appears highly unlikely
any candidate can win the votes necessary for election
in the parliament.

¶3. (SBU) On June 13, Ruutel declared his intention to
seek a second term. The PU General Assembly convened on
June 18 and 297 delegates unanimously endorsed Ruutel as
their presidential candidate in the second round.
(Comment. With only 13 PU seats in the Parliament,
Ruutel has no chance to win in the first round.
Consequently, PU has determined to focus its efforts in
the second round, as Ruutel has more support in the
Electoral College, which includes both parliamentarians
and representatives of local governments. End Comment).
Party Leader Villu Reiljan then dispatched a public
letter to Center Party leader Edgar Savisaar proposing
that the two parties cooperate to elect the President in
the Electoral College.

¶4. (SBU) The Center Party has indicated that it will
continue to participate in the effort to find a single
presidential candidate, while also entering into
negotiations with People's Union. While Savisaar
continues to keep everyone guessing, one thing Center
has made clear is its opposition to Ilves, who currently
ranks ahead of the other candidates (including Ruutel)
in popularity with the Estonian public.

¶5. (SBU) Comment. Particularly now that there are no
Center Party nominees left among the candidates being
discussed by the five parties, there has been increasing
speculation in the media that Center intends to strike a
deal with the People's Union.   Under the terms of this
(assumed) deal, the two parties would ensure the
election goes to the Electoral College where they can
join forces to elect Ruutel President. In exchange for
Center's support, Ruutel would call on Savisaar to form
the next government if -- as Center believes is likely --
 his party wins the most votes in next spring's
parliamentary elections. There is also speculation that
Savisaar will ultimately back Ruutel because he hopes to
move on from Prime Minister to President in five years,
when Ruutel would be unable to run for a third term.
Whether or not these rumors are true, it is clear that
Savisaar is in the cat bird's seat right now, and he is
in no hurry to tip his hand too far in advance of the
first round of voting in the parliament on August 28.

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